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ABSTRACT

The Optional Extended Year (OEY) program was initiated in Texas in 1995 and first implemented in the Austin Independent School District (AISD) in 1996. The primary focus of the OEY programs is to reduce student retention in grade through four school day options: (1) extended day; (2) extended week; (3) intersessions for year-round schools; and (4) summer school. In the 1997-98 school year, 43 elementary and 15 middle schools received OEY funding. Administrators and teachers in each program were asked to provide information about program operation and about students. In most schools, the OEY programs focused on reading and mathematics. Most students who attended were promoted to the next grade. There was considerable parent involvement in OEY programs. Recommendations for program improvement centered on implementing a standard curriculum targeting a specific area with a standardized pretest and posttest to measure student achievement. Professional development and increased parent participation are also recommended. (Contains four tables.) (SLD)

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FEEDBACK

Austin Independent School District

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OPTIONAL EXTENDED YEAR PROGRAM

The Optional Extended Year (OEY) program was initiated in Texas in 1995 (Senate Bill 1) and was first implemented in the Austin Independent School District (AISD) in 1996. The noncompetitive grant funds are awarded to Texas public school districts with high concentrations of students with an economic disadvantage. For the 1997-98 school year, 58 schools (43 elementary and 15 middle schools) received OEY funding in AISD. Sixty-four separate OEY programs were offered across these campuses, and 4,510 students participated in the sessions. There were 414 teachers and 95 support staff funded with OEY monies.

PROGRAM OPTIONS

The primary focus of the OEY programs is to reduce student retention. The programs are designed to accommodate four school-day options: 1) extended day; 2) extended week; 3) intersessions for year -round schools; and 4) summer school. Table 1 provides information on the number of schools in AISD that offered each of these types of programs between summer 1997 and summer 1998.

Table 1: Number of AISD Schools Participating in Optional Extended Year Activities

	Summer 1997	Day 1997-98	Week 1997-98	Year-Round 1997-98	Summer 1998
Elementary	25	4	2	10	30
Middle School	14	4	1	0	13

The participating schools have latitude in the type of student support that is offered in the instructional program. There were considerable differences among the various schools. The primary types of student support offered, in order of frequency of use, were described as the following: reading skills; mathematics; general language arts; thematic units; writing; complex problem-solving skills; technology; TAAS objectives; and science labs.

The majority of the schools offered programs that focused on teaching reading skills and mathematics. In addition, two schools offered programs in nonacademic areas: team-building skills via the Challenge course, and special interest/life skills workshops. *It is recommended that the district provide some guidelines for curriculum in the OEY program and support in the form of professional development for the teachers.*

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Administrators and teachers in each program were asked to provide various types of information about the programs and students. Four key areas were: 1) identification of students who completed the program; 2) student promotion and retention data; 3) how students' academic performance was monitored during the program; and 4) how parents were involved in the program.

Program Completion and Student Promotion and Retention

In 1997-98, students who attended 90% of the OEY program days and met the district's policy for promotion on the basis of academic achievement were promoted to the next grade level. In prior years, promotion was based on attendance only. A parent or guardian can request in writing that a

student be retained; none did. In total, 4,510 students completed the OEY program in 1997-98. Table 2 contains information on student promotion and retention across three years, 1995-96 through 1997-98. The increase in the number of students retained over the years can be explained, at least in part, by the changes in the requirements for promotion instituted during the 1997-98 school year.

Table 2: Number of OEYP Students Promoted/Retained by Grade, 1995-96 through 1997-98

	1995-96		1996-97		1997-98	
Grade	Promoted	Retained	Promoted	Retained	Promoted	Retained
K	359	1	261	1	195	4
1	655	7	819	18	673	27
2	689	7	635	10	636	18
3	595	6	581	1	590	5
4	469	2	528	5	485	9
5	156	0	359	3	237	5
6	192	0	286	0	477	0
7	332	0	329	0	625	0
8	267	0	322	0	524	0
Total	3,714	23	4,120	38	4,442	68

Monitoring Student Progress

The faculty and administrators for each school program selected their own methods of monitoring student progress in the OEY program. Student portfolios, skills checklists, and classroom tests were the most frequently used methods for monitoring student progress. Teachers employed running records, informal reading inventories, PALM tests, and student performances and student products to measure academic achievement. Some less frequently used methods of monitoring student progress including math journals, self-monitoring on the computer, parent input, and academic pre- and posttests. Table 3 contains a list of the various ways student progress was monitored, along with the number of students monitored by each method, organized by program type.

Table 3: Methods for Monitoring Student Progress by Program Types

Monitoring	Extended Day		Extended Week		Summer		Intersession	
Method	Elem.	MS	Elem.	MS	Elem.	MS	Elem.	MS
Parent Survey	40	0	0	17	223	306	4	NA
TAAS Scores	96	122	134	122	NA	NA	529	NA
Academic Records	181	228	0	6	527	460	298	NA
Student Portfolios	79	232	6	6	2	904	330	NA
Skills Checklist	96	65	13	6	1002	98	508	NA
Classroom Tests	20	25	65	17	5	694	320	NA
Other	0	77	2	0	1020	735	703	NA

Note: When campuses reported using TAAS test results for the summer school program, these data were not included in Table 3 as TAAS tests were not administered during this time period.

Some schools gathered pre- and posttest information. However, most did not have a plan for precise monitoring of student progress. Currently, campuses are required to identify methods that they use to monitor student progress. In some cases, the criteria campuses used for determining program eligibility were mistakenly reported, instead of the criteria for determining student progress. *It is recommended that the district provide some guidelines for monitoring student progress in the 1998-99 school year.*

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Each campus was asked to provide information regarding the number of parents involved in the OEY program in two ways: 1) descriptions of parent activities; and 2) instances of ongoing parent participation in the program.

Parent Activities

Nearly all campuses reported parent activities as a part of their program; only two elementary schools and one middle school provided no parental involvement data. Table 4 is a compilation of the types of parent activities occurring in the district followed by the number of parent contacts. The activities are listed by frequency of occurrence.

Table 4: Parent Involvement Activities Across Campuses

Parent Activity	Number of Parent Contacts	Parent Activity	Number of Parent Contacts
Newsletters	3,528	**Home Visits**	387
Assemblies/ Performances	1,245	**Phone Calls/Attendance**	269
Fliers/Letters	1,232	**Daily Notes**	261
Parent Orientations	977	**Phone Calls for Conferencing**	231
Parent Conferences	861	**Field Trip Assistance**	197
Parent Workshops	682	**Student Reports/Certificates**	48
Home Reading Programs	405	**Parent Surveys**	47

Overall, there was considerable involvement of parents in various types of activities in the OEY programs. Many of these activities provided personal support to families of students who were experiencing difficulty in school. Some of these activities were parent conferences, parent workshops and programs, home reading programs, and home visitations. *It is recommended that campuses that do not have a high rate of parent involvement be encouraged to examine this list as a means of expanding their own parent involvement applications.*

Ongoing Parent Involvement

Ongoing parent involvement occurring consistently over time was reported in five different ways (the actual number of parents involved appears in parenthesis): tutors for students (168); classroom assistants (136); special area monitors/assistants (133); cafeteria monitors (25); and parent advisory committees (12). Ongoing parent involvement is the least frequently occurring way in which parents are involved at the campuses. Only 30 of the 64 schools listed ongoing parent involvement on their evaluation reports. *It is recommended that the district support campuses through professional development in effective methods of parental involvement.*

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fifty-eight schools in AISD (43 elementary and 15 middle schools) received OEY monies to support students who were experiencing difficulty in school. Most students who attended these programs in 1997-98 were promoted to the next grade. The majority of the OEY programs focused on further development of literacy and mathematical skills. Many different methods were used to monitor student progress; however, monitoring could be standardized. There was considerable involvement of parents in the OEY programs; however, more ongoing parent involvement is needed.

A standard curriculum targeting a specific area with a standardized pre- and posttest measure of improvement in student achievement is suggested for use in OEY programs in 1998-99. In addition, specific professional development activities should be offered in coordination with instructional areas targeted for the Optional Extended Year program.

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